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A wife's long wait for her husband

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Special to the Journal

The scene through which McLean dentist Eva Shadrin lived must be one which terrorizes any spouse of a person working for a government.

On a December evening in 1975 while Eva attended an opera in Vienna, Austria, her husband Nicholas, under the auspices of the United States government, met with two Russians. After the opera, in their Viennese hotel room, Eva waited for her husband to return.

Now, after eight years of waiting, she is still wondering what happened that night. Nicholas had been tried in absentia and sentenced to death for defecting from Russia 16 years earlier. He was in Vienna to meet Russian informers. He could be termed an American double agent. But Eva is still not certain that the Russians he met simply double-crossed him and carried out the death sentence.

She has never been told he is dead. Perhaps the reason is because the U.S. government, fully aware of dangers to double agent defectors, didn't adequately protect Nicholas. Thus, perhaps it doesn't want to embarrass itself publicly by admitting it failed to protect someone it placed in jeopardy.

At first, she was cautioned by CIA agents not to "go public" with the mystery of her husband's disappearance. But after years of waiting for U.S. government officials to tell her about that night, Shadrin occasionally shares her wait with the media in hopes that some information about her husband will surface. The latest appearance was this past Sunday on NBC's "First Camera" news program, in an interview segment with Lloyd Dobyns.

Also, she periodically meets with people at the Pentagon. "They are deciding whether to declare Nick dead or not," she says.

Does she want that pronouncement to come about?

"No, not really," she adds. "They don't do anything for a dead man."

She does not want to see the files on Nick shut once and for all. If that happened the hope for information which she has lived with for eight years would be at an end.

When thinking realistically, Dr. Shadrin admits that she does not believe her husband is alive.

But when questioned about where she thinks he might be if by some slim chance he survived the meeting with the Russians in Vienna, Dr. Shadrin believes that her husband is confined and under tight security in Russia.

The Shadrins were not a typical Northern Virginia couple from the beginning of their residence

in McLean less than a year after their defection from communist East European countries in 1959.

In 1959, Nicholas Shadrin, known then as Nikolai Artamanov, was at age 27 the youngest Russian naval captain in the U.S.S.R. fleet. Eva Gora, now Dr. Shadrin, had just finished work for her dental degree in her native Gdansk, Poland.

In his book, "Shadrin: The Spy Who Never Returned", Chatham, Va., writer Henry Hurt weaves a romantic story of two people living in communist countries who meet accidentally and fall madly in love.

"Oh, yes," says Dr. Shadrin, beaming, "Mr. Hurt's book is very factual. I agree with the book totally."

In the book the young Eva Gora is courted by the handsome naval captain against her family's wishes. At one point Nicholas suggested to Eva that he would like to defect. He will only do it, he said, if she will accompany him. After much thought and agony, she agreed.

Would she take that sea voyage in a cabin cruiser from Poland to Sweden across the Baltic Sea again, if she had her life to live over?

"Even knowing what I know now?" she asks, her eyes clouding with remembrance of the years. "Yes, I would. I was young. I had a wonderful future to look forward to. But if I had it to do again, yes, I would do it again with Nick."

Any changes in her life would have come after she and Nick landed in Sweden.

"If I had it to do over, I might not have come to the United States. A man in Sweden warned us about the United States government. He said that they would use you and then forget you. He was right," she adds grimly.

Would she want to move to another country?

"Now?" she asks, startled at the thought. "No, certainly not. I have all my friends here. This is my home. I have my dental friends, my ethnic friends. It takes time, years," she explains, "to build up friendships. They are too important to me now. I wouldn't move now."

Would she move to another part of the United States? A larger city like New York?

She laughs when considering the idea.

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"Everyone says life in New York City is so exciting and Washington is just a lazy Southern town," she says, shaking her head in contradiction and amazement.

Besides, by staying in the Washington area, where she has built up her practice and cultivated an extensive array of friends, she is also close to the hub of American government and possible information about Nick.

After their defection and after Nicholas Shadrin's debriefing by the United States government, the Shadrins bought a home in McLean.

Both attended college: Eva took courses at Howard University, receiving a degree and certification so that she could be a practicing dentist in her new country; Nick earned a master's degree in engineering from George Washington University and went on for a doctorate in international affairs.

Both became United States citizens, Nick after Eva because the law stipulates that former Communist Party members must wait 10 years before they can apply for naturalization.

The Shadrins had no children but to hear Dr. Shadrin talk about her 10-month-old German shepherd puppy, Ilsa, is like hearing a parent talk about a child. "I don't let Ilsa into the office," Dr. Shadrin says. Ilsa's predecessor, Trezor, she adds, was her "office assistant."

"He was huge. He weighed about 115 pounds. When he walked around upstairs you could hear him down in the office. He was my office assistant — he would bring my tools to me. In fact, he would get upset when I wouldn't let him in," she adds with a reminiscent chuckle.

But she returns to thoughts of life with her husband. From the start the Shadrins' lives were divergent. The world of Nick Shadrin revolved around spies, counterspies, the CIA and the KGB. The world of Dr. Eva Shadrin revolved around her dental practice and her Polish friends.

"If I were to give advice . . . if I were to go back, I would find out more about what Nick was doing. I was young and unconcerned with things that seemed a little strange and out of place. So I was totally surprised when Nick didn't come back to the hotel room," she explains.

Two days ago, when NBC television presented the Shadrins' story, Dr. Shadrin had to relive that traumatic moment all over again for the cameras.

"The hardest thing was . . ." Dr. Shadrin explains, haltingly, "they wanted me to go back to Vienna, to the hotel where we stayed. I have never been back since that time . . . At first I said, 'No, it's impossible.' But they persuaded me.

"I thought it would be harder . . .," she says lapsing into a brooding silence. Then she looks up and shrugs.

"I have gone over and over everything in my mind. But I would just like to know for certain . . .

"I am hoping that the television show will be seen by someone with a conscience. I am hoping . . ." Words fail her.



Dr. Eva Shadrin: 'If I had to do it again, yes, I would . . .'